

The concept of Xenia, or generous hospitality to strangers, is demonstrated multiple times in the first four books of Homer's *The Odyssey* as a way not only of portraying the Greeks' sacred view of of hospitality but also as a way of demonstrating the importance of Telemachus' journey and destiny as he is guided by the goddess Athena. In Book 1, when the disguised Athena visits the estate of Telemachus and Penelope, Telemachus immediately greets the "stranger," invites her to dinner, and offers her any needed assistance for her travels in spite of the fact that he is currently overwhelmed by the brazenness of his mother's intrusive suitors. Of course, Telemachus' welcoming reflects well on him as a benevolent host, but by today's standards, his would be an unusually kind and altruistic way in which to treat a total stranger. However, as we see in this book and later on, welcoming anyone who comes to your door was essentially the unwritten law in Greece at the time. The Greeks practically treated Xenia as a religious obligation, and they always considered the possibility that a humble stranger may turn out to be a disguised deity; this is another theme in Greek mythology known as Theoxenia, which is illustrated perfectly by Telemachus' welcoming of the disguised Athena.

Hospitality is shown to an even greater extent in Book 3 when Telemachus and the disguised Athena pay a visit to the wise King Nestor in their journey to uncover the whereabouts of Odysseus:

There sat Nestor among his sons as friends around them
decked the banquet, roasted meats and skewered strips for broiling.
As soon as they saw the strangers, all came crowding down,
waving them on in welcome, urging them to sit. (Homer III. 36-39)

Without a second thought, King Nestor and his subjects all welcome Telemachus upon his arrival. Not only does Nestor welcome the guests, he provides for their food, bathing, and luxurious sleeping arrangements, later gifting Telemachus a full-maned team of horses hitched to a chariot as well as some bread, wine, and meats. Upon recognizing that the stranger with Telemachus is actually Athena, Nestor also sacrifices a heifer with its horns dipped in gold in Athena's honor. It is difficult to believe the degree to which Nestor cares for his guests in such a short period of time; he treats them as if they were kings themselves.

In Book 4, Xenia is demonstrated yet again when Telemachus reaches the palace of King Menelaus. Before he even has a chance to meet and speak with the king, Telemachus (as well as the disguised Athena) is bathed and clothed by some of the servants at the palace. Then, he is greeted by Menelaus with these words:

Help yourselves to food, and welcome! Once you've dined
we'll ask you who you are. But your parents' blood
is hardly lost in you. You must be born of kings,
bred by the gods to wield the royal scepter.
No mean men could sire sons like you. (Homer IV. 68-72)

Again, Telemachus and Athena are readily welcomed and complimented on their appearance. Menelaus' welcoming is very similar to that of Nestor, and it seems likely that Telemachus could go practically anywhere and be greeted with the same degree of hospitality. However, an important question to ask is whether hosts like Nestor and Menelaus would welcome him if he did not look so regal and impressive. If he had a more common or even poverty-stricken demeanor, would the standards of Xenia still apply to the same extent? Telemachus would probably not be welcomed as lavishly if he were not so appealing in look and manner. Furthermore, if Telemachus were not guided by Athena, he would likely not be as eloquent and prominent in his interactions with his hosts. Therefore, it seems that Telemachus' adventure to discover the whereabouts of his father is divinely guided, in particular by Athena, and it is this guidance to which Telemachus should attribute his success. The recurring portrayal of Xenia through the interactions of Telemachus and his hosts in *The Odyssey* demonstrates both the degree to which the Greeks prioritized being a hospitable host and the degree to which Telemachus is inspired in his important quest.